

Traffic Safety News & Facts For Employers January 15, 2003

- The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles is scheduled this month to submit to lawmakers a report on distracted driving and auto accidents. A new law, passed by the state legislature in April 2002, requires that the source of distractions, whether it is another passenger in the car, eating a burger, or talking on a cell phone, be noted in accident reports.
- On Nov. 3, there was a massive collision on the Long Beach Freeway in California that represented a breakdown of order and rational behavior, sending 198 vehicles into a massive junk pile in soupy fog. With visibility reduced to just a few feet that Sunday morning, one car after another plowed into each other. In some cases, drivers were speeding through the dense fog at 70 mph; in other cases they managed to crash at 20 miles mph, according to witnesses. More than 100 people were treated at eight hospitals after the accident, though miraculously no one was killed. Fog experts with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the California Highway Patrol offer the following tips to avoid serious injury:
 - Reduce speed-and watch your speedometer. Fog creates a visual illusion of slow motion when you may actually be speeding.
 - Use your low beam headlights and fog lights if you have them. High beams will reflect off the fog, creating a "white wall" effect.
 - Be patient. Avoid passing, changing lanes and crossing traffic.
 - Use pavement markings to help guide you. Use the right edge of the road as a guide, rather than the centerline.

- Increase your following distance. You will need extra distance to brake safely.
- Keep your windows and mirrors clean. Use your defroster and wipers to maximize your vision.
- If the fog is too dense to continue, pull completely off the road and try to position your vehicle in a protected area away from the other traffic. Turn on your hazard/emergency flashers.

- According to the National Safety Council, crash-related deaths among military personnel increased 35 percent over 2001. This is the highest fatality rate for military personnel in the last four years. As of November, more than 320 servicemen died in traffic crashes. Nearly half would have survived had they been wearing their seatbelts, NSC believes. Military bases are now cracking down on belt violations, said NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey Runge, M.D. U.S. Marine Corps commandant Gen. James Jones commented, "We are losing more young men and women in traffic crashes than in combat and training combined. We don't leave our young servicemen and women on the battlefield, and we shouldn't leave them on the highway either."
- A substantial proportion of motor vehicle crashes involving 16-to 24-year olds are alcohol related, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Alcohol-impaired driving is highest among 21-to-24-year olds, and the percentage of fatal crashes that are alcohol-related is highest for this age group. However, alcohol-related crashes are also a serious problem for the youngest drivers, CDC warns. Not only are drivers under age 21 more likely than older drivers to be involved in fatal crashes, but their added risk for fatal crash involvement increases "more sharply" at all levels of alcohol use. CDC data indicates that the largest decrease in alcohol-related fatal crashes in 1982-2001 was among drivers under 21, the target group for several interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving. CDC therefore recommends that public health and traffic safety professionals ensure that communities implement comprehensive and effective strategies to reduce alcohol-impaired driving.

- A new poll by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), *Sleep in America*, has determined that 51 percent of Americans sometimes feel sleepy while driving. In addition, 17 percent say they have actually fallen asleep while driving in the past year. Males and drivers 18 to 29 years old are at highest risk for drowsy driving and falling asleep at the wheel. Seventy-one percent of these 18-to 29-year-olds report driving while drowsy in the past year. Adults with children in the household are more likely to drive drowsy than those without children. Older adults, age 65 and older, are least likely to drive while drowsy or to fall asleep behind the wheel. For more information on the poll, visit the NSF website at www.sleepfoundation.org.
- In the crime-fighting arsenal, laptop computers mounted in patrol cars are now standard equipment for many departments. They give officers quick and easy access to vital information. But safety experts warn that the seemingly helpful tool could be deadly, given the right circumstances. NHTSA recently issued a warning that patrol car computers, and other electronic equipment, that are mounted in the path of an airbag have become projectiles in crashes and caused serious injury. Other safety experts add that laptop computers can be the cause of some crashes because officers aren't paying attention to the road. Worse yet, drivers who cause such crashes don't readily admit that they were distracted, said Charles Pembleton, president of the National Association of Professional Accident Reconstruction Specialists. "Without some serious controls and true accountability, we will really never know just how they actually impact the increase in car crashes," Pembleton said, "but the truth will be that people will crash while using these devices and people could die during these crashes." Across Central Florida, law enforcement agencies have been equipping patrol cars with laptop computers for nearly a decade. Officers say they make their jobs easier. At the same time, officers are putting themselves, and the drivers around them, at risk, safety experts said. Although there are no national standards for using laptops and other electronic devices, the International Association of Chiefs of Police recommends that the equipment be mounted out of the path of airbags.

- Consumers Union (CU) recently reviewed the performance of tires when the tread is worn. Worn tires can be dangerous on wet roads, where the grooves aren't deep enough to channel water out from beneath the tread. Wet weather braking and snow traction also decreases as tires wear. The faster one drives, the greater the risk of hydroplaning, since higher speeds allow less time for water to escape through tread grooves. Reduced wet weather braking can be even more dangerous than hydroplaning, according to CU. On CU's test track, compared with new tires those with half their tread depth took 3 to 6 feet longer to come to a stop from 40 mph with the antilock braking system engaged. For more information on tire tread, call the Consumers Union at (914) 378-2000.
- The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Office of Research and Technology is hosting a series of three external stakeholder forums to gather input on its future research agenda. These external forums will focus on research topics that improve commercial motor vehicle safety and security. Key areas of discussion will include:
 - Drivers
 - Vehicles
 - Roadside/Infrastructure
 - Motor Carriers
 - Security

These workshops are the first in an annual series of stakeholder forums that FMCSA is planning to conduct regarding its research agenda. The workshops will be held in the following locations:

- February 6, 2003 - San Diego, CA
- February 12, 2003 - Austin, TX
- February 20, 2003 - Washington, DC

road-wise workforce



All workshops will begin at 9:00 AM and adjourn at approximately 4:00 PM.

[View the workshop's preliminary agenda.](#)

To register for the R&T Stakeholder Forum by e-mail, send your name, title, organization, address and contact numbers to Ms. Erin Fogel of Cambridge Systematics at edf@camsys.com.